

How Low Can You Mow?

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. There is a sad misunderstanding with many homeowners that if they mow their lawn as low as they can, they won't have to mow it more often. Not only is this concept wrong, it also will kill fescue and bluegrass lawns. Our warm season grasses like buffalograss, Bermuda and Zoysia can be mowed low, like 1½ to 2½ inches tall. In fact they can be mowed shorter than this but you need to have a reel type mower not a rotary mower. But fescue and bluegrass are different. Warm season grasses have leaf blades that are horizontal which allows the lower mowing heights. Fescue and bluegrass have very upright leaf blades. To maintain the same amount of area for a health stand of grass you need to have a longer leaf blade. Constantly mowing at a short height robs the plant of the factory needed to produce food, the root system becomes stunted and the grass plant becomes less and less healthy, ultimately dying if things aren't changed. You also need the longer leaf blades to shade the soil. Many of our common lawn weeds can only get established if sunlight hits bare soil. So by keeping the ground shaded, weeds have much less of a chance to get started. Tall fescue is also a bunch grass. We just plant it close enough together so it looks like a sod. By keeping the grass mowed taller it improves the look of the lawn. Finally, whatever grass you have, you should never take off more than 1/3 the total height of the grass. If you are mowing at 2 inches, you need to cut when it's not even 3 inches tall. Mowing at 3½ inches you cut by 5.25 inches tall. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Winter Damage Issues Starting to Show Up

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. It was a long winter, it was a hard winter, it was a dry winter. Sure, we had more than normal snowfall, but it was a very dry snow. And temperatures for several months in a row were below normal. You add all of this together and it is the perfect equation for winterkill on ornamental plants. Sometimes winterkill is total. The above ground portion of the plant is dead as are the roots. Other times it's just a burn back sort of situation. Deciduous evergreen shrubs, like boxwood, holly and Euonymus can all show this burn back sort of damage. The thing to remember is that after the damage shows up, there's nothing to be done to "fix" it. You can only deal with from here on. If it's burn back or top kill, then often all we need to do is cut out the dead and wait for the plant to regenerate new growth. Mimosa and crape myrtle regularly die back to the ground in our area because we can get those ten and fifteen below zero temperatures. As the plant starts to leaf out you can start to prune out what's dead. The biggest mistake is excessive pruning too early in the season. Wait a little while and the plant will tell you what's alive and what isn't! But if you get into mid June and there's no new foliage coming out, it's probably time to remove and replace. What you replace with depends on many things and you may want to give me a call. I'm seeing a lot of winter scorch on junipers or cedars. Don't be in a hurry to prune these. You really need to give the plant time to initiate new growth. Remember it is important to keep it evergreens watered especially in dry winters! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Late May Gardening

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Late May in the vegetable garden is an exciting time. Cool season crops are growing rapidly and there is so much that you can be planting at this time of year. As cool season crops like radishes, spinach, peas, etc are finishing up, that space can be devoted to warm season crops. Clear into early June you can plant snap beans or lima beans. I always recommend that if you are mainly interested in fresh eating of these, stagger your planting. Don't plant 6 rows of beans at the same time - plant 2 this week, wait 2 weeks and plant 2 more, then a couple of weeks later the final 2. You won't have as many beans ready at once and you can enjoy a long harvest of fresh green beans. Most of our vine crops can still be planted. That includes melons of all kinds, cucumbers, pumpkins and summer squash. You don't want to plant winter squash, things like acorn and butternut until June so that they aren't trying to mature in the middle of August. Even though some folks were busy planting tomatoes in April, we are now finally in the middle of the preferred time to be planting tomatoes. I'm sure more than a few tomato plants went into cold weather shock last week. Those tomato cousins, peppers and eggplants can also be going in the ground now as well. I don't encourage staggered planting of these as they will continue to bear once they start. I do recommend that people use a little common sense in how many they plant. Sweet corn is a crop best left to large gardens. Multiple long rows planted at the same time work best. We can plant sweet corn well into late June. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.